

## U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge  
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
2700 Suwannee Canal Road  
Folkston, GA 31537  
Phone: (912) 496-7366  
Fax: (912) 496-3332  
<http://www.fws.gov/okefenokee/>

# News Release



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Contact: Arthur Webster (912) 496-7366 x 233

## Drought Delivers First Okefenokee Swamp Fire of 2011

At approximately 5:30pm on April 29, 2011, officials at Okefenokee National Wildlife Refuge received preliminary reports of wildfire on the southwest portion of the Refuge, south of Honey Island. Currently, the fire has burned roughly 670 acres within the interior of the swamp.

The fire is believed to have been caused by a lightning strike, and is spreading over extremely dry scrub-shrub vegetation, a result of the severity of present drought conditions. The incident location is in an area with no public access, and should not affect daily visitation at any of the Refuge's 3 main entrances.

At this time, fire officials are confident the remote location of the burn poses little threat to nearby communities or structures; however it is possible that drivers along Hwy 177 and Hwy 441 in Clinch County may encounter smoke clouds resulting from the fire as the situation progresses.

The presence of wildfire is a natural occurrence in wetland ecosystems and is a common management tool used to restore longleaf pine habitat native to southeastern Georgia. Conditions will continue to be monitored closely by Fish and Wildlife and Georgia Forestry Commission who are working together to manage the fire. Resources will be deployed as necessary to ensure the protection of natural resources and the safety of Service employees, partners and surrounding communities. Additional information regarding the wildfire will be made available as the situation develops.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. The Service manages the 150-million-acre National Wildlife Refuge

System, which encompasses 554 national wildlife refuges, thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 70 national fish hatcheries, 65 fishery resources offices and 86 ecological services field stations. The agency enforces federal wildlife laws, administers the Endangered Species Act, manages migratory bird populations, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign and Native American tribal governments with their conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Assistance program, which distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

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